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HARPER
SKETCHES of SOUTHERN
LIFE

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SKETCHES
OF
SOUTHERN LIFE.

by
FRANCES E. WATKINS HARPER.

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OUR ENGLISH FRIENDS.

OUR ENGLISH FRIENDS. KEY

Your land is crowned with regal men,
Whose brows ne'er wore a diadem,—
The men who, in our hour of need,
Reached out their hands and bade God speed

Who watched across the distant strand
The anguish of our fainting land,
And grandly made our cause their own,
Till Slavery tottered on her throne.

When Slavery, full of wrath and strife,
Was clutching at the Nation's life,
How precious were your words of cheer
That fell upon the listening ear.

And when did Fame, with glowing pen,
Record the deeds of nobler men,—
The men who, facing want and pain,
Loved freedom more than paltry gain.

O noble men! ye bravely stood
True to our country's highest good;
May God, who saw your aims and ends,
Forever bless our English friends!

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3. SKETCHES OF SOUTHERN LIFE.

ree AUNT CHLOE.

I REMEMBER, well remember,
That dark and dreadful day,
When they whispered to me, "Chloe,
Your children's sold away!"

It seemed as if a bullet
Had shot me through and through,
And I felt as if my heart-strings
Was breaking right in two.

And I says to cousin Milly,
"There must be some mistake;
Where's Mistus?" "In the great house crying—
Crying like her heart would break.

"And the lawyer's there with Mistus;
Says he's come to 'ministrate,
'Cause when master died he just left
Heap of debt on the estate.

"And I thought 'twould do you good
To bid your boys good-bye—
To kiss them both and shake their hands
And have a hearty cry.

"Oh! Chloe, I knows how you feel,
'Cause I'se been through it all;
I thought my poor old heart would break
When master sold my Saul."

Just then I heard the footsteps
Of my children at the door,
And I rose right up to meet them.
But I fell upon the floor.

And I heard poor Jakey saying,
"Oh, mammy, don't you cry!"
And I felt my children kiss me
And bid me, both, good-bye.

Then I had a mighty sorrow,
Though I nursed it all alone;
But I wasted to a shadow,
And turned to skin and bone.

But one day dear uncle Jacob
(In heaven he's now a saint)
Said, "Your poor heart is in the fire,
But child you must not faint."

Then I said to uncle Jacob,
If I was good like you,
When the heavy trouble dashed me
I'd know just what to do.

Then he said to me, "Poor Chloe,
The way is open wide:"
And he told me of the Saviour,
And the fountain in His side.

Then he said "Just take your burden
To the blessed Master's feet;
I takes all my troubles, Chloe,
Right unto the merey-seat."

His words waked up my courage,
And I began to pray,
And I felt my heavy burden
Rolling like a stone away.

And a something seemed to tell me,
You will see your boys again—
And that hope was like a poultice
Spread upon a dreadful pain.

And it often seemed to whisper,
Chloe, trust and never fear;
You'll get justice in the kingdom,
If you do not get it here.

THE DELIVERANCE.

Master only left old Mistus
One bright and handsome boy ;
But she fairly doted on him,
He was her pride and joy.

We all liked Mister Thomas,
He was so kind at heart ;
And when the young folkes got in scrapes,
He always took their part.

He kept right on that very way
Till he got big and tall,
And old Mistus used to chide him,
And say he'd spile us all.

But somehow the farm did prosper
When he took things in hand ;
And though all the servants liked him,
He made them understand.

One evening Mister Thomas said,
"Just bring my easy shoes :
I am going to sit by mother,
And read her up the news."

Soon I heard him tell old Mistus
"We're bound to have a fight;
But we'll whip the Yankees, mother,
We'll whip them sure as night!"

Then I saw old Mistus tremble;
She gasped and held her breath;
And she looked on Mister Thomas
With a face as pale as death.

"They are firing on Fort Sumpter;
Oh! I wish that I was there!—
Why, dear mother! what's the matter?
You're the picture of despair."

"I was thinking, dearest Thomas,
'Twould break my very heart
If a fierce and dreadful battle
Should tear our lives apart."

"None but cowards, dearest mother,
Would skulk unto the rear,
When the tyrant's hand is shaking
All the heart is holding dear."

I felt sorry for old Mistus;
She got too full to speak;
But I saw the great big tear-drops
A running down her cheek.

Mister Thomas too was troubled
With choosing on that night,
Betwixt staying with his mother
And joining in the fight.

Soon down into the village came
A call for volunteers ;
Mistus gave up Mister Thomas,
With many sighs and tears.

His uniform was real handsome ;
He looked so brave and strong ;
But somehow I could'nt help thinking
His fighting must be wrong.

Though the house was very lonesome,
I thought 'twould all come right,
For I felt somehow or other
We was mixed up in that fight.

And I said to Uncle Jacob,
" Now old Mistus feels the sting,
For this parting with your children
Is a mighty dreadful thing."

" Never mind," said Uncle Jacob,
" Just wait and watch and pray,
For I feel right sure and certain,
Slavery's bound to pass away ;

"Because I asked the Spirit,
If God is good and just,
How it happened that the masters
Did grind us to the dust.

"And something reasoned right inside,
Such should not always be;
And you could not beat it out my head,
The Spirit spoke to me."

And his dear old eyes would brighten,
And his lips put on a smile,
Saying, "Pick up faith and courage,
And just wait a little while."

Mistus prayed up in the parlor
That the Secesh all might win;
We were praying in the cabins,
Wanting freedom to begin.

Mister Thomas wrote to Mistus,
Telling 'bout the Bull's Run fight,
That his troops had whipped the Yankees,
And put them all to flight.

Mistus' eyes did fairly glisten;
She laughed and praised the South,
But I thought some day she'd laugh
On tother side her mouth.

I used to watch old Mistus' face,
And when it looked quite long
I would say to Cousin Milly,
The battle's going wrong;

Not for us, but for the Rebels.—
My heart 'would fairly skip,
When Uncle Jacob used to say,
"The North is bound to whip."

And let the fight go as it would—
Let North or South prevail—
He always kept his courage up,
And never let it fail.

And he often used to tell us,
"Children, don't forget to pray;
For the darkest time of morning
Is just 'fore the break of day."

Well, one morning bright and early
We heard the fife and drum,
And the booming of the cannon—
The Yankee troops had come.

When the word ran through the village,
The colored folks are free—
In the kitchens and the cabins
We held a jubilee.

When they told us Mister Lincoln
Said that slavery was dead,
We just poured our prayers and blessings
Upon his precious head.

We just laughed, and danced, and shouted,
And prayed, and sang, and cried,
And we thought dear Uncle Jacob
Would fairly crack his side.

But when old Mistus heard it,
She groaned and hardly spoke;
When she had to lose her servants,
Her heart was almost broke.

'Twas a sight to see our people
Going out, the troops to meet,
Almost dancing to the music,
And marching down the street.

After years of pain and parting,
Our chains was broke in two,
And we was so mighty happy,
We didn't know what to do.

But we soon got used to freedom,
Though the way at first was rough;
But we weathered through the tempest.
For slavery made us tough.

But we had one awful sorrow,
It almost turned my head,
When a mean and wicked cretur
Shot Mister Lincoln dead.

'Twas a dreadful solemn morning,
I just staggered on my feet;
And the women they were crying
And screaming in the street.

But if many prayers and blessings
Could bear him to the throne,
I should think when Mister Lincoln died,
That heaven just got its own.

Then we had another President,—
What do you call his name?
Well, if the colored folks forget him
They wouldn't be much to blame.

We thought he'd be the Moses.
Of all the colored race;
But when the Rebels pressed us hard
He never showed his face.

But something must have happened him,
Right curi's I'll be bound,
'Cause I heard 'em talking 'bout a circle
That he was swinging round.

But everything will pass away—
He went like time and tide—
And when the next election came
They let poor Andy slide.

But now we have a President,
And if I was a man
I'd vote for him for breaking up
The wicked Ku-Klux Klan.

And if any man should ask me
If I would sell my vote,
I'd tell him I was not the one
To change and turn my coat ;

If freedom seem'd a little rough
I'd weather through the gale ;
And as to buying up my vote,
I hadn't it for sale.

I do not think I'd ever be
As slack as Jonas Handy ;
Because I heard he sold his vote
For just three sticks of candy.

But when John Thomas Reeder brought
His wife some flour and meat,
And told her he had sold his vote
For something good to eat,

You ought to seen Aunt Kitty raise,
And heard her blaze away ;
She gave the meat and flour a toss,
And said they should not stay.

And I should think he felt quite cheap
For voting the wrong side ;
And when Aunt Kitty scolded him,
He just stood up and cried.

But the worst fooled man I ever saw
Was when poor David Rand
Sold out for flour and sugar ;
The sugar was mixed with sand.

I'll tell you how the thing got out ;
His wife had company,
And she thought the sand was sugar,
And served it up for tea.

When David sipped and sipped the tea,
Somehow it didn't taste right ;
I guess when he found he was sipping sand,
He was mad enough to fight.

The sugar looked so nice and white—
It was spread some inches deep—
But underneath was a lot of sand ;
Such sugar is mighty cheap.

You'd laughed to seen Lucinda Grange
Upon her husband's track ;
When he sold his vote for rations
She made him take 'em back.

Day after day did Milly Green
Just follow after Joe,
And told him if he voted wrong
To take his rags and go.

I think that Curnel Johnson said
His side had won the day,
Had not we women radicals
Just got right in the way.

And yet I would not have you think
That all our men are shabby ;
But 'tis said in every flock of sheep
There will be one that's scabby.

I've heard, before election came
They tried to buy John Slade ;
But he gave them all to understand
That he wasn't in that trade.

And we've got lots of other men
Who rally round the cause,
And go for holding up the hands
That gave us equal laws.

Who know their freedom cost too much
Of blood and pain and treasure,
For them to fool away their votes
For profit or for pleasure.

AUNT CHLOE'S POLITICS.

Of course, I don't know very much
About these politics,
But I think that some who run 'em,
Do mighty ugly tricks.

I've seen 'em honey-fugle round,
And talk so awful sweet,
That you'd think them full of kindness,
As an egg is full of meat.

Now I don't believe in looking
Honest people in the face,
And saying when you're doing wrong,
That "I haven't sold my race."

When we want to school our children,
If the money isn't there,
Whether black or white have took it,
The loss we all must share.

And this buying up each other
Is something worse than mean,
Though I thinks a heap of voting,
I go for voting clean.

LEARNING TO READ.

Very soon the Yankee teachers
Came down and set up school ;
But, oh ! how the Rebs did hate it,—
It was agin' their rule.

Our masters always tried to hide
Book learning from our eyes ;
Knowledge did'nt agree with slavery—
'Twould make us all too wise.

But some of us would try to steal
A little from the book,
And put the words together,
And learn by hook or crook.

I remember Uncle Caldwell,
Who took pot-liquor fat
And greased the pages of his book,
And hid it in his hat.

And had his master ever seen
The leaves upon his head,
He'd have thought them greasy papers,
But nothing to be read.

And there was Mr. Turner's Ben,
Who heard the children spell,
And picked the words right up by heart,
And learned to read 'em well.

Well, the Northern folks kept sending
The Yankee teachers down ;
And they stood right up and helped us,
Though Rebs did sneer and frown.

And, I longed to read my Bible,
For precious words it said ;
But when I begun to learn it,
Folks just shook their heads,

And said there is no use trying,
Oh ! Chloe, you're too late ;
But as I was rising sixty,
I had no time to wait.

So I got a pair of glasses,
And straight to work I went,
And never stopped till I could read
The hymns and Testament.

Then I got a little cabin—
A place to call my own—
And I felt as independent
As the queen upon her throne.

CHURCH BUILDING.

Uncle Jacob often told us,
Since freedom blessed our race
We ought all to come together
And build a meeting place.

So we pinched, and scraped, and spared,
A little here and there;
Though our wages was but scanty,
The church did get a share.

And, when the house was finished,
Uncle Jacob came to pray;
He was looking mighty feeble,
And his head was awful grey

But his voice rang like a trumpet;
His eyes looked bright and young;
And it seemed a mighty power
Was resting on his tongue.

And he gave us all his blessing—
'Twas parting words he said,
For soon we got the message
The dear old man was dead.

But I believe he's in the kingdom,
For when we shook his hand
He said, "Children, you must meet me
Right in the promised land ;

"For when I'm done a moiling
And toiling here below,
Through the gate into the city
Straightway I hope to go."

THE REUNION.

Well, one morning real early
I was going down the street,
And I heard a stranger asking
For Missis Chloe Fleet.

There was a something in his voice
That made me feel quite shaky,
And when I looked right in his face,
Who should it be but Jakey!

I grasped him tight, and took him home—

What gladness filled my cup!

And I laughed, and just rolled over,

And laughed, and just give up.

“Where have you been? O Jakey, dear!

Why didn't you come before?

Oh! when you children went away

My heart was awful sore.”

“Why, mammy, I've been on your hunt

Since ever I've been free,

And I have heard from brother Ben,—

He's down in Tennessee.

“He wrote me that he had a wife.”

“And children?” “Yes, he's three.”

“You married, too?” “Oh no, indeed,

I thought I'd first get free.”

“Then, Jakey, you will stay with me,

And comfort my poor heart;

Old Mistus got no power now

To tear us both apart.

“I'm richer now than Mistus,

Because I have got my son;

And Mister Thomas he is dead,

And she's got 'nary one.

"You must write to brother Benny
That he must come this fall,
And we'll make the cabin bigger,
And that will hold us all.

"Tell him I want to see 'em all
Before my life do cease:
And then, like good old Simeon,
I hope to die in peace."

"I THIRST."**FIRST VOICE.**

I THIRST, but earth cannot allay
The fever coursing through my veins;
The healing stream is far away—
It flows through Salem's lovely plains.

The murmurs of its crystal flow
Break ever o'er this world of strife;
My heart is weary, let me go,
To bathe it in the stream of life;

For many worn and weary hearts
Have bathed in this pure healing stream
And felt their griefs and cares depart,
E'en like some sad forgotten dream.

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THE DYING QUEEN.

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SECOND VOICE.

"The Word is nigh thee, even in thy heart."

Say not, within thy weary heart,
Who shall ascend above,
To bring unto thy fever'd lips
The fount of joy and love.

Nor do thou seek to vainly delve
Where death's pale angels tread,
To hear the murmur of its flow
Around the silent dead.

Within, in thee is the living fount,
Fed from the springs above;
There quench thy thirst till thou shalt bathe
In God's own sea of love.

THE DYING QUEEN.

"I would meet death awake."

THE strength that bore her on for years
Was ebbing fast away,
And o'er the pale and life-worn face,
Death's solemn shadows lay.

With tender love and gentle care,
Friends gathered round her bed,
And for her sake each footfall hushed
The echoes of its tread.

They knew the restlessness of death
Through every nerve did creep,
And carefully they tried to lull
The dying Queen to sleep.

In vain she felt Death's icy hand
Her failing heart-strings shake;
And, rousing up, she firmly said,
"I'd meet my God awake."

Awake, I've met the battle's shock,
And born the cares of state;
Nor shall I take your lethean cup,
And slumber at death's gate.

Did I not watch with eyes alert,
The path where foes did tend;
And shall I veil my eyes with sleep,
To meet my God and friend?

Nay, rather from my weary lids,
This heavy slumber shake,
That I may pass the mystic vale,
And meet my God awake.
